Public Policy Process

GOALS, CONTINUED
Tradeoffs Between Liberty and Security

- The problem of dependence
  - If we provide economic security to the poor and the unemployed, do we grant them security at the cost of their liberty?
    - If we value liberty, we place security in the hands of the family or household, thereby eliminating government intrusion
    - If we value security, we make this a government function, thereby possibly limiting liberty
    - But what if security makes people freer?
The Liberty/Equality Tradeoff

- People have different talents, skills etc., thus, gov't should equalize these resources.
- This is positive liberty, not negative liberty, and makes many American uncomfortable.
- Negative liberty—freedom to
- Positive liberty—freedom from
This Session’s Objectives

- Describe the idea of a problem
- Learn how to define and frame problems
- Explore problem advocacy
Let’s put up some examples

- What are some of the problems that you have identified thus far?
Problem Defined:

- “A question or situation that presents uncertainty, perplexity, or difficulty,
- “[a] source of trouble or annoyance”

American Heritage Dictionary
Problem Identification

• When problems are revealed to
  o Key policy makers or other actors
  o The broader public

• What is a problem?
  • How do we know it is a problem?
  • How do we persuade other people that something is a problem? And that something should be done about it.
Conditions and problems

- **Conditions**: things in the world that may be bad, but that we cannot do much about.
- **Problems**: things that are bad in the world about which something can reasonably be done.
Problems arise due to ....

- Focusing events
- Changes in indicators
- Changes in the nature of the condition itself
  - Increased scientific knowledge
  - Increased technical capability
- Changes in the social construction of the problem
The social construction of problems

- Example of social construction: drunk driving
- Example: target populations of policies
- Deborah Stone discusses
  - symbols
  - numbers
  - stories about causes
  - Interests and decisions (which come later)
Symbols

- A symbol is “anything that stands for something else.”
- Some examples of symbols?
Four Aspects of Symbolic Representation

- Metaphors
- Synecdoche (figures of speech “in which a part is used to represent the whole.”)
- Ambiguity—a crucial feature of symbols in politics
  - Does the same symbol mean the same thing to everyone?
- Narrative Stories
Types of symbolic stories

- Narrative stories (anecdotes)
  - Synecdoche
  - Government run amok
- Stories of decline or of progress halted
- Stories of helplessness and control
Causal stories

- Stories about how bad things happen
- The goal of various interests is to tell the causal story that works for them.
- Examples of causal stories
  - Airplane crashes and other mechanical problems
  - Stories of crime and poverty
  - Stories of decline and failure (example: the economic mess we are in)
Causes and Causal Stories

- Causal stories about what causes problems
- The table on page 191 gives two dimensions to causal stories
  - Actions that are either purposeful or unguided
  - Consequences that are either intended or unintended
- Does it matter if one argues that something was unguided with unintended consequences (an accident) versus, say, something purposeful and intended (a conspiracy) or purposeful and unintended (inadvertent causes)?
Types of metaphors

- **Contagious disease**
  - Symbolize deterioration and decline
  - The poor as having some sort of “pathology.”

- **War**
  - The War on Poverty
  - The War on Drugs
  - But...Carter’s “moral equivalent of war” speech backfired.
Types of metaphors

- Machines and mechanical devices
- Wedges and Inclines
  - “Thin edge of the wedge”
  - “Slippery slopes” ladders
- Containers
  - “Spill overs”
Story lines

- Stories of decline
  - Stymied progress stories
  - Change is only an illusion

- Stories of helplessness and control
  - “What had formerly appeared to be ‘accidental,’ ‘random,’ ... or ‘natural’ is now alleged to be amenable to change through human agency.”
  - Conspiracy stories
  - Blame the victim stories
The “Horror Story”

“Politicians or interest groups deliberately choose one egregious or outlandish incident...” to justify change.

Examples:
- Welfare queens
- Excessive regulation
- Huge jury settlements (Examples: OSHA and the tooth fairy, the McDonald’s scalding case.)
John Kingdon talks about indicators as one of two ways issues reach the agenda.

- The other way is focusing events

Using numbers is one way to tell a causal story

Deciding to count a phenomenon is a policy decision itself.
The decision to count something is a highly political act

- Sometimes we choose not to count things because of the political implications of the data

- Sometimes numbers are only partial measures
  - How do we measure an elephant?

- Numbers are metaphors
Numbers as metaphors

- Counting means selecting one feature over a set of other features.
- Counting requires judgment, and can lead to challenges on the basis of
  - Inclusion and exclusion
    - Example: the Unemployment Rate
  - a real difference between things being counted
    - Example: Hospital beds
Causal Strategies in Program Definition (page 204)

- Show that the problem is caused by an accident of nature
- Show that a problem formerly interpreted as accident is the result of human agency
- Show that the effects of an action were secretly intended by the actor
- Show that the low probability effects of an action were accepted as a calculated risk by the actor
- Show that the cause of the problem is so complex that only large-scale policy changes at the social level can alter the cause
Indicators ≠ the problem itself

- The Gross Domestic Product
- The Census
- Tests like the SAT
- In statistics we call this the validity problem
- Is the statistic the best measure of the underlying problem?
- Choices of statistics matter--for example, the mean and the median
Basic Aspects of Problem Definition (Bardach)

• Dos:
  ○ Think of deficits and excesses (too much, too little)
  ○ Make it evaluative—that is, “why is this a public problem?” Think about “market failure” – that is, the failure of a needed good to be delivered by the market.

• Don’ts
  ○ Do not define the solution into the problem.
    ▪ Example: “there’s not enough regulation of problem banks.”
    ▪ Example: “Educating teens about birth control would reduce teen pregnancy.”
  ○ The problem statement should kick off a range of discussions of solutions
  ○ Exception: When you have a solution, and are looking for a problem to attach it to.
Other ways to think of problems

- Problems that arise because markets work (inequality)
- Problems of discrimination against groups (why is this a problem?)
- Missed opportunities
- “‘Conditions that cause problems are also problems.’ However, the causes must be real, not merely assumed.” The causal chain must be proven.
General Research Tools

- Google
- Google Scholar – Peer-reviewed research (use from on campus!)
- The THOMAS Database – Bills, enacted legislation: [http://thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov)
- JSTOR – Peer-reviewed research
- Ebsco – Peer-reviewed research and professional/technical journals
- Lexis-Nexis
  - Congressional Information
  - News
- Cases: Legal Information Institute at Cornell: [http://www.law.cornell.edu/](http://www.law.cornell.edu/)
Data on the Economy

- Statistical abstract of the United States
  - [http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/)
- Gross Domestic Product
  - [http://www.bea.gov/national/index.htm#gdp](http://www.bea.gov/national/index.htm#gdp)
- Gross state and regional product
- Census information [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)
- North Carolina information [http://linc.state.nc.us/](http://linc.state.nc.us/)